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AUTHOR Denton, Carolyn A.; Hasbrouck, Jan E.
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ABSTRACT

This booklet is part of a series of seven booklets designed to introduce aspects of effective reading instruction that should be considered when teaching reading to students with disabilities. It focuses on essential skill building and teaching activities related to developing a child's ability to recognize and read whole words. The methods described of teaching reading to students with disabilities have been shown to be particularly effective. An introduction discusses general principles for teaching reading to students with disabilities and emphasizes the importance of individually designing a program based on a student's strengths and needs, parent involvement, and academic modifications. Information is organized into the following sections: what word identification is, why it is important, what parents can do, what teachers can do, information for second language learners, and resources. Strategies include making sure that instruction in word identification is included in the child's reading program, making flashcards of common sight words, directly teaching high-frequency sight words to students in the classrooms, teaching structural analysis, and using appropriate computer programs. (CR)

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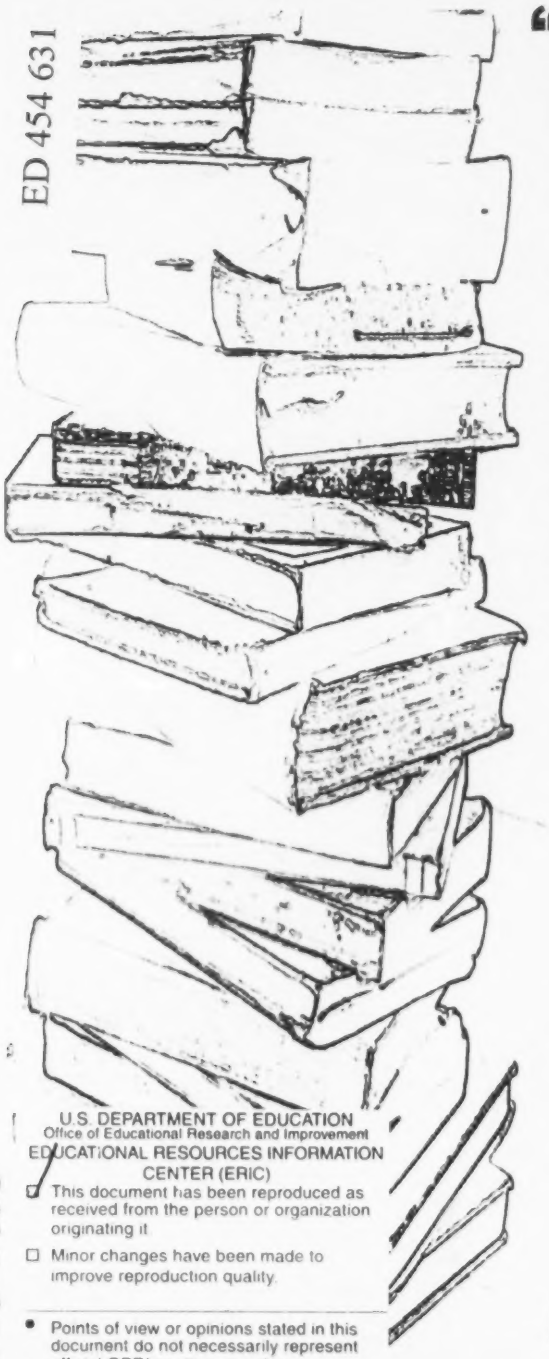

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"Word Identification"

from

Teaching Students with Disabilities to Read

by Carolyn A. Denton
Jan E. Hasbrouck
Texas A&M University

Prepared by
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September 2000

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1135 Tremont St., Suite 420, Boston, MA 02120
617-236-7210 (voice/TTY) • fax: 617-572-2094 • www.fcsn.org

Parents Engaged in Education Reform (PEER) is a national technical assistance project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. PEER's purpose is to support parents of children with disabilities and their organizations to be informed, active participants in education reform efforts. In addition, to enhance opportunities for early literacy in reading for at-risk students, PEER is providing information and training to parent and community organizations in promising and best practices in literacy.

The Federation for Children with Special Needs is a nonprofit organization based on the philosophy of parents helping parents. Founded in 1974 as a coalition of twelve disability and parent organizations, today the Federation is an independent advocacy organization committed to quality education and health care for all, and to protecting the rights of all children. To this end, the Federation provides information, support, and assistance to parents of children with disabilities, their organizations, their professional partners, and their communities.

For more information about the PEER Project or the Federation for Children with Special Needs, please contact the Federation's Central Office at:

1135 Tremont St., Suite 420
Boston, MA 02120
617-236-7210
617-572-2094 fax
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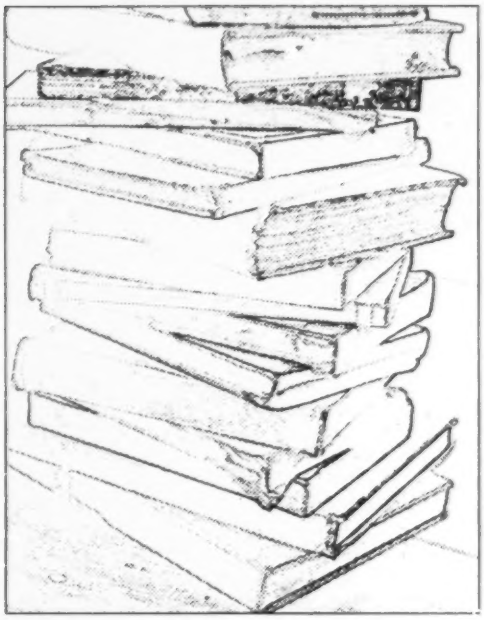
Word Identification



Word Identification is the third of a seven-part series of Resource Briefs that comprises *Teaching Students with Disabilities to Read: A PEER Resource Booklet.* Titles of Resource Briefs in this series of PEER Literacy Resource Briefs include:

Brief #1: Phonological Awareness

Brief #2: Systematic Phonics Instruction

Brief #3: Word Identification

Brief #4: Supported Passage Reading

Brief #5: Fluent Reading

Brief #6: Reading Comprehension

Brief #7: Early Intervention in Reading

Word Identification is organized into these sections:

- General principles to keep in mind
- What is word identification?
- Why is it important?
- What can parents do?
- What can teachers do?
- Conclusion
- Resources
- References

General principles to keep in mind

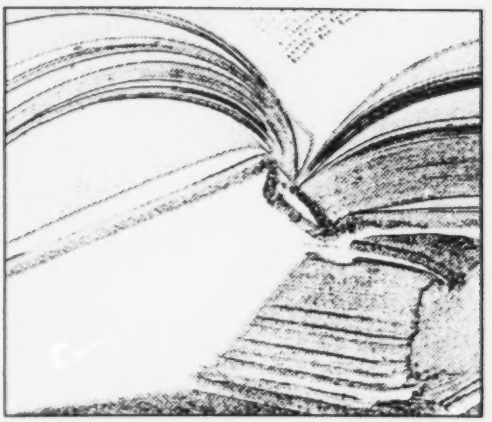
Reading is very important for success in our society, yet as many as one in five students has difficulty learning to read. Most students with learning disabilities, and many students with other types of disabilities, have problems in the areas of reading, writing, and spelling. This **Literacy Resource Brief** introduces parents and teachers to essential skill-building and teaching activities related to developing a child's ability to recognize and read whole words. Methods of teaching reading to students with disabilities described here have been shown to be particularly effective. Some of these methods are used in regular education classrooms for students who are just learning to read (Kindergarten through Grade 2), but they are still relevant and useful for students with disabilities of any age who have not learned to read well. Instructional materials should be selected with an eye toward age appropriateness.

The following key issues in reading instruction for students with disabilities are important regardless of the age or ability level of a student.

- Students with all types of disabilities have the *right* to quality reading instruction, whether they are in elementary, middle, or high school. Parents have the *right* to insist that the school provide instruction designed to help their children with disabilities improve their reading skills. These issues should be addressed in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

- Reading programs for students with disabilities should be individually designed based on a student's strengths and needs. Parents and teachers should not make judgments about a student's ability to learn, or about the best way to teach him or her, based solely on a student's disabling condition or label. Every individual student's abilities, needs, and life situation must be carefully evaluated and considered in the IEP in order to design the best reading program for that student.

- Many students with disabilities may need modifications (changes) in the way they receive instruction, and in the way they fulfill class requirements in order to succeed in areas such as science, social studies, and language arts. These modifications are very important, but *they should not take the place of instruction* designed to help students with disabilities improve their reading skills.



Students with all types of disabilities have the *right* to quality reading instruction, whether they are in elementary, middle, or high school.

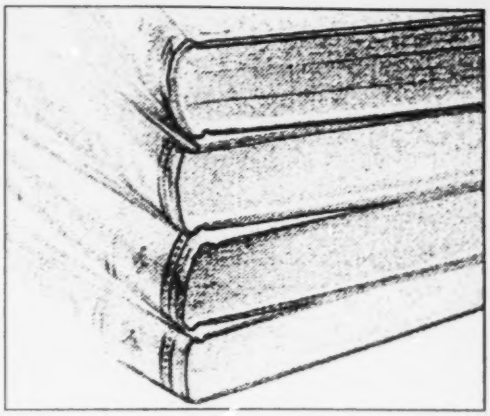
- Parents should, first and always, communicate with their child's teacher(s). Parents can simply ask their child's teacher(s) what can be done to help the child at home. Parents should also recognize themselves and be recognized as important sources of information about their child's interests, abilities, and learning styles. Coordination of school and home efforts is one of the best ways to help a student succeed. Strategies to ensure communication and coordination between school and home can be addressed in the student's IEP.

- The reading material used in reading instruction has to be "not too hard, not too easy," but at the right level for a student. Actual reading of real stories or other material should be part of a student's reading program.

- In the past, some people believed that certain methods of teaching reading were best for students with certain disabilities: that some methods were best for students with brain injury, that others were better for students with learning disabilities, and that still other methods were best for students with mental retardation. This is not the case. The success of a method of teaching reading depends on the content of the program, the way it is taught, the intensity of the instruction (how often and how actively it is taught), and the needs and strengths of the individual student.

- Although different methods of teaching reading may work equally well with students having various disabilities, students benefit when instruction is systematic and structured. Reading skills should be introduced in careful order, and students must be given a great deal of practice and repetition in each skill, so that they master each skill before new ones are introduced.

- **Note for second language learners:** Students who come to school unable to speak English should first be taught



to read in their *native language*. Later, as they gain proficiency in spoken English, they should be taught to extend these skills to reading in English. This practice, however, is not possible in all school situations. Instructional materials may not be available in the child's native language, or there may not be a teacher who can speak and read in the child's native language. If students cannot speak English, and they cannot be taught to read in their native language, they should be given time to develop their proficiency in spoken English before they begin reading instruction. They need to learn English speech sounds and vocabulary. English reading instruction should begin *after* the student can speak English well enough to benefit from instruction.

Reference

Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.) (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children.* Washington D.C.: National Academy Press.

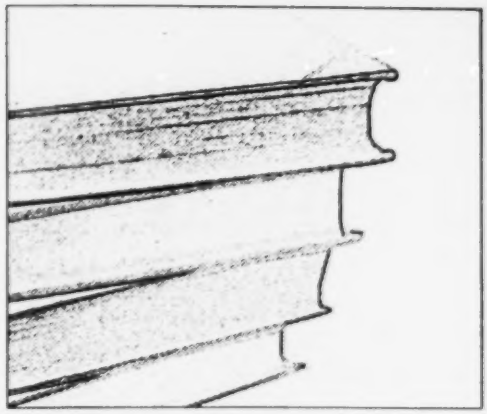
What is word identification?

Word identification means recognizing and reading a word. People identify words in different ways. Some words are recognized "at sight." That means that a person just looks at the word and knows it right away. Successful readers read most words in this way.

Many words cannot be sounded out successfully because they do not follow regular rules (like the word "was"). Other words, called "high-frequency words" are so common in English reading that they must be recognized quickly and automatically by effective readers. (Some examples are "went," "she," and "the.") These words are often called "sight words" because they must be read "at sight," without thought or study. It is important that beginning readers and struggling readers learn to identify many high-frequency sight words quickly and easily.

Why is it important?

Students must be able to recognize words to be able to read. The importance of systematic phonics instruction for students with disabilities has been discussed in the Brief dealing with that subject. (Please see **Brief #2: Systematic Phonics Instruction.**) "Sounding out" is the first word identification tool most students learn. In order to "sound out," students must be secure in their knowledge and use of letters and sounds, and they must be able to pay



People identify words in different ways. Some words are recognized "at sight." That means that a person just looks at the word and knows it right away.

attention to the meaning of the story to decide what words make sense as they read. If they have to stop and sound out many words, they will read very slowly, and they will not be able to understand and remember what they read.

Students see thousands of words when they read books and do schoolwork. They must be able to read most words automatically, knowing them "at sight." This is especially important for words which the student will encounter often in print. For example, a focus on sight words related to a student's ability to function independently would be an appropriate component of an overall

approach to literacy instruction. For older students, a sight word vocabulary of longer, more complicated words should be developed and advanced word identification strategies should be taught.

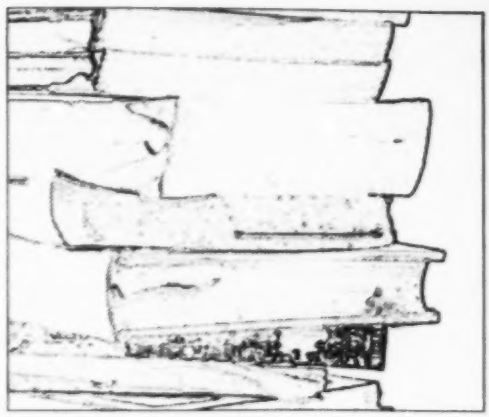
What can parents do?

Parents can ask their child's teacher whether word identification instruction and practice is included in their child's reading program. There are several good programs that teach different types of word recognition skills. Parents of students with disabilities should insist that instruction in word identification be included in their child's program if it is needed.

When listening to their child read, parents can help their child know what to do when he/she gets to a "hard part." They can remind the child to start the word and say it slowly (see **Brief #2: Systematic Phonics Instruction**). They can also remind the child to think about what word would make sense in the sentence. (See **Brief #4: Supported Passage Reading** for more suggestions.)

Parents can play games with their children to help them practice quick word identification. *These games are for children who already can read a few words.* Below are some steps for sight-word recognition games:

Step One: Ask your child's teacher for a list of common "sight words" or



"high-frequency words." One common list is called the Dolch Words List. *The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists* (see Resources, below), has a list of "Instant Words." If your child is learning specific vocabulary words, ask the teacher for a list of words he/she is learning in school.

Step Two: Write 10-15 of the words on note cards. Try to include words your child knows, words your child knows but has to think about, and words your child does not know. For children who know very few words, start with only 5 or 6 words on cards, and include the child's name. Students with more severe reading difficulties may need to study only 2 or 3 words at a time.

Step Three: Have your child read the words on the cards. Show your child a word. If he/she cannot read the word right away, wait five seconds and then say the word. Have your child repeat the word correctly. If the child has difficulties, take some of the

words out of the deck and practice the remaining words until they are known.

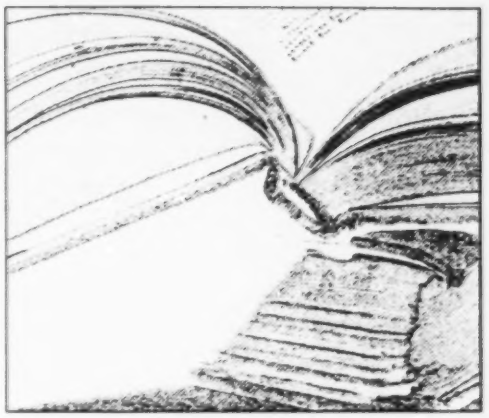
Step Four: You can also play a game called "My Pile, Your Pile." Have your child try to read each word quickly. If the child reads the word correctly, put it on the child's pile. If he misses the word, put it on your pile. When the game is over, count to see who has the most cards. Then teach and review the words the child missed and play again.

Step Five: As the child becomes able to read all of the words on the note cards, make new cards and add them to the deck. Add no more than 5 new words at a time. For some students, add only 1 word at a time.[1]

What can teachers do?

- Teachers can directly teach high-frequency sight words to students, and have students practice reading and writing them. Lists of words should be kept short enough and simple enough to ensure the student's success. Focus on teaching the words that are most important and useful for the student, such as words they often miscall when reading or functionally important words. Writing words while saying them can help students remember the words.

1. **Editor's Note:** Children who are unable to speak can play by matching the words to pictures or to the same word on another card.



Focus on teaching the words that are most important and useful for the student, such as words they often miscall when reading or functionally important words.

- Teachers can post lists of high-frequency words on the walls of their classrooms. Students can practice the "word walls" by students reading the words together. Students can also look at the words when they are writing to be sure that they are spelling these words correctly.

- Teachers can directly teach important core vocabulary words for subject areas such as math and science before they ask students to read the textbook or materials for these subjects.

- For older students, teachers can teach structural analysis. That

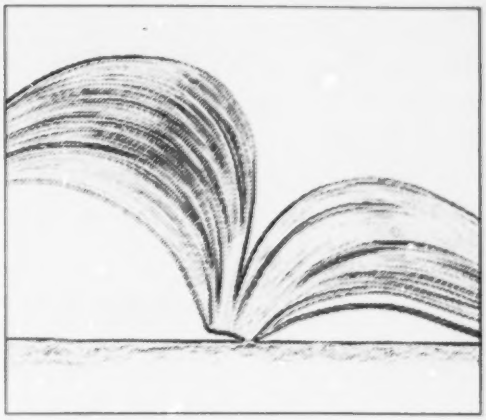
means breaking longer words into parts such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes and using those parts to pronounce words and understand their meanings. *Word Identification Strategy*, a training based on this idea, is available for teachers from the University of Kansas. It is part of their *Learning Strategies Curriculum*. (See **Resources**.)

- Some computer programs provide excellent practice in sight word reading.

- Some students learn words that are commonly used in directions for preparing simple meals. An excellent list of these words is provided in the article by Schloss and others, listed in the **References** section.

- Students may be taught to read signs and labels, such as road signs and medicine labels, schedules such as the *T.V. Guide* or bus schedules, maps, advertisements, directions for the use of tools or equipment, job applications, and many other items important in day-to-day living.

- Some students may learn to recognize important words in a specific area of interest or skill. For example, a student who is learning to work on word projects in a woodshop may learn to read words such as "jigsaw," "sandpaper," and "flammable." The Edmark Company produces computer software designed to teach important



functional vocabulary words, and an updated list of essential survival words is found in the Davis & McDaniel article in the *Reading Teacher*. (See **Resources**.)

- Still other students may be taught to recognize pictures or symbols instead of, or along with, words. They may learn to recognize logos such as the McDonald's arches or pictures associated with a certain kind of breakfast cereal or soft drink. Store coupons have been used to teach product recognition in preparation for independent grocery shopping. Some books written specifically for persons with cognitive limitations, for example, combine pictures with simple words to give directions for cooking and daily life skills. Students have also been taught to "write" by typing picture symbols into a specially designed computer. The Attainment Company, listed in **Resources**, sells many books and computer materials which combine pictures with important vocabulary words for various life skills.

- Several other methods have been effective for teaching sight word reading. In one method, the teacher shows the student a flash card with the word on it, waits four or five seconds, then says the word. After some practice, the student can say the word with the teacher, then without the teacher's help. In other methods, pictures are presented along with the words. These pictures are gradually faded out, and the student is able to read the words without the picture cues. In some approaches, the student is taught to pick out the word being taught from other words on the same page. At first, the other words look very different from the one being taught. Gradually, the student learns to pick out the word from other words that look more similar to it. The *Edmark Reading Program* and the computer software that goes along with it (see **Resources**) have been effective in teaching useful sight words to many students with mental retardation, for example.

Conclusion

With proper instruction and support, many more students than previously thought capable of reading can learn to read. Reading can open the door to success, enabling students to live fuller, more independent lives and to succeed in a variety of careers. This **PEER Literacy Resource Brief** has outlined some areas of critical concern in reading education for students with disabilities. When parents and teachers have access to the information they need, they are better equipped to make decisions about students' educational programs.

Resources

NOTE: These resources may be helpful to teachers and parents. They are listed here merely as options. The authors of this paper do not recommend any particular program, materials, or test.

Edmark Reading Program and Edmark Functional Word Series (Print and Software) available from PCI Educational Publishing, (800) 594-4263; www.pcicatalog.com, and from Pro-Ed, (800) 897-3202; www.proedinc.com.

Essential Sight Words Program, available from PCI Educational Publishing, (800) 594-4263; www.pcicatalog.com.

An Essential Vocabulary: An Update. In *The Reading Teacher,* vol 52, No. 3, November 1998, pp. 308-309.

Mayer-Johnson Picture Symbols. Published by PCI, (800) 594-4263.

The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists, by Fry, Kress, & Fountoukidis (1993). New York: Center for Applied Research in Education. ISBN 0-13-762014-4. (Contains lists of "Instant Words," lists of prefixes and suffixes and their meanings, key vocabulary words for different subjects for the middle school and high school student, and other useful information.)

Strategies Intervention Model (Word Identification Strategy), training and information available from the University of Kansas, Center for Research on Learning, 3061Dole Center, Lawrence, KS 66045.

Word Matters by Pinnell & Fountas, published by Heinemann, (800) 793-2154.

Words That Work: A Life Skills Vocabulary Program and Survival Vocabulary Words and Stories: Learning Survival Words in Context. Distributed by PCI, (800) 594-4263.

Companies with Materials for Word Reading and Communication Instruction for Students with Disabilities (Call for Catalogs)

Academic Communication Associates (ask for Special Education catalog): (760) 758-9593; www.acadcom.com.

Attainment Company: (800) 327-4269

Cambridge Development Laboratory (software): (800) 637-0047; (781) 890-4640.

Communication Aids for Children and Adults: (414) 352-5678.

Flaghouse: (800) 793-7900.

Kaplan: (800) 334-2014, www.Kaplanco.com.

PCI: (800) 594-4263.

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Schloss, P.J., Alexander, N., Hornig, E., Parker, K., & Wright, B. (1993). Teaching Meal Preparation Vocabulary and Procedures to Individuals with Mental Retardation. *Teaching Exceptional Children,* 25 (3), pp. 7-12.

Thomas, G.E. (1996). *Teaching Students with Mental Retardation.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merrill.

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